DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 045 CG 014 439

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TITLE Professional Development for Counselors of Women: A Workshop Model.
PUB DATE 11 Apr 80
NOTE 21p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (64th, Cincinnati, OH, April 9-12, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; *Counseling Objectives; Counselor Attitudes; *Counselor Client Relationship; *Counselors; *Females; Followup Studies; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; Research Projects; *Sex Stereotypes; Skill Development; Workshops

ABSTRACT

A three-day conference was held to improve counselors' abilities to help female clients respond to changing roles. An extensive evaluation was conducted to determine: (1) the extent to which the workshop changed participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding women in the work world; (2) how the workshop could be improved; and (3) for what types of counselors this workshop would be beneficial. The conference activities included panel discussions, lectures, small and large group discussions, and review of a videotaped job interview. Overall, 93% of the participants gave the workshop a rating of very good or excellent, citing the panel discussions and the opportunity for discussions with other counselors as particularly effective. One month following the workshop 45% of those responding to a follow-up questionnaire had completed at least one of three goals they had set for creating changes at their worksite. However, there was no measureable improvement in counselors' knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a result of the workshop. Respondents also indicated that the workshop was appropriate for counselors from various backgrounds and worksettings. (Author)

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Professional Development for Counselors of Women: A Workshop Model

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A paper presented at the 1980 National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors' Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio
April 11, 1980

CG 014439

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The reassessment of traditional sex roles has made it possible for women of all ages and life stages to consider alternatives seldom open to them in the past. The challenge of new opportunities, however, is not without problems. Counselors of women are confronted with clients who are simultaneously exhilarated and confused by the options which are open to them--both the traditional and nontraditional. The Center for Education Research and Evaluation at The Pennsylvania State University, under a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, developed a three-day workshop for counselors of women to help them meet women's needs in making career/life-planning decisions.

Evaluation Design

A strong emphasis on formative evaluation pervaded the planning, publicity, and implementation of this workshop. Information concerning both process and outcome was sought. The object of the extensive evaluation was to determine (a) what changes had occurred in counselors' knowledge, skills and attitudes as a result of the workshop, (b) how the workshop could be improved, and (c) for what types of counselors this workshop would be a beneficial form of professional development.

The workshop was widely advertised to encourage attendance by counselors from private and community agencies, Adult Basic Education (ABE) centers and vocational education schools, and colleges and universities. Forty-one of the 112 applicants were invited to the workshop. Of the 33 counselors who registered, for purposes of post-test only evaluation, 23 became the treatment group. Twenty-four people who applied for the workshop but, because of space limitations, were not invited to attend, became the control group. Because of restrictions by the funding source all ABE counselors who applied were accepted, therefore ABE counselors were not included in either treatment or control groups.

Four types of evaluations ultimately were made: (a) pre/post comparisons within the workshop group in order to assess changes in knowledge and skill; (b) treatment and control group comparisons in order to assess differences in attitudes, knowledge, and skill; (c) subjective rating of the workshop activities by participants; and (d) reports of participants on their effectiveness in reaching goals set during the workshop period.

Workshop Content

Each of the three day's activities included small group meetings, panel discussions, and large group sessions. Day one focused on the role of the counselor; day two focused on client problems and concerns; day three was devoted to implementing efforts to overcome sex discrimination and sex-role stereotyping.

The first day served as a period for participants to become acquainted and to become comfortable in the workshop setting. In general, the purpose of the first day was to introduce participants to information that may have been unfamiliar to them and to allow them opportunities to explore their own values and opinions concerning the role of women. The activities for day one were intended to form a foundation of trust and sharing upon which the remainder of the workshop depended.

Following registration, participants completed the knowledge test, Male and Female Participation in the Work Force. The project director then delivered an overview of the workshop and a talk concerning the changing roles of women. Changes in the family and the work force were highlighted and a considerable amount of carefully documented

statistical information was included. A get-acquainted activity was then held in small groups in which participants interviewed each other and then prepared an introduction. There was a small group activity that involved reviewing handouts about the changing labor force, family, and so forth which was followed by discussion. Following this first small group activity, participants were asked to provide written comments on the videotape of a counseling interview (one of the pre/post measures).

During the afternoon session, participants were asked to draw their lifeline detailing personal and professional events on a timeline. This exercise was followed by a panel of women representing different lifestyles and different career choices (the introductory panel). Panel participants included a professional volunteer, a carpenter, a steel roller, and physician, all women. Each of these women discussed their own lifeline, what influenced them in making their decisions, the supports that have been available to them, their experience with counseling, and what issues were important to them presently. The final activity of the first day was another small group activity which concerned identifying typical client problems. Counselors also discussed the implications for counselors of expanded role expectations for women.

At the close of the first day, and subsequent days, participants provided written evaluation of the day's activities. As a homework assignment, counselors were asked to be prepared to respond to this statement, "Counselors stereotype and limit their clients' options when they _____."

The focus of the second day of the workshop was on client problems and concerns. In small groups the homework was discussed. This was followed by a card game played in small groups. This game involved becoming aware of stereotypes concerning clients, and recognizing the importance of learning as much information as possible about a client. There were eight categories of cards including marital status, SES, education, work experience, interests, values, age, and children. In each category there were a number of possibilities given. For example, there were four values cards: (a) values education and knowledge, (b) values service to others, (c) values working as a team, (d) values individual effort and independence from supervision. By revealing one card at a time in each category a composite of a client would develop. After reviewing only three, participants were asked, "What assumptions have you made about this client, and why do you suppose this person is coming for counseling?" The response of participants would change as additional cards were revealed. When all eight cards were revealed, one card would be changed. For example, age might change from in the twenties to in the fifties, and participants were asked to explore how this affected their perceptions or assumptions about the client. Finally, participants were asked to imagine that this fictional client was male rather than female and discuss how that would have changed their assumptions or plans for the client. Following this small group game, a lecture was presented on life career planning by a counselor from continuing education at Penn State. This lecture focused on learning values clarification, interest and skill assessment, and using these techniques in dealing with typical

problems when facing life/career plannning. Later that morning another small group activity was conducted which involved role playing typical counseling situations. Participants formed groups of two, role played a counseling session, and then were evaluated by other members of the group.

In the afternoon a panel discussion on job search techniques was held. Two women who were with retraining groups ran this session. One person spoke about the job search in a rural location and the other in an urban location. The final activity of the second day was a small group exercise in decision making regarding a career decision. Participants were given a case study and were asked to evaluate the importance of various considerations in this fictional individual's career decision. As a homework assignment, participants were asked to review Pennsylvania laws on sex discrimination. Handouts were provided.

The focus of the third day was overcoming sex discrimination and sex role stereotypes. To illustrate some problems in the job interviewing process, a videotape of a job interview was presented along with the resume and application form of the individual whose interview was being shown. Following the presentation of the videotape a discussion of resume and application writing and interview techniques was held. Later the entire group reconvened to hear a panel discussion on the employer's viewpoint. Panelists included personnel supervisors from four major corporations. Panelists addressed some of the following questions: (a) what are some of the employment options for women in your particular field, (b) what are some of the difficulties a woman

might face upon entering any one of these fields and how might a counselor help in overcoming these obstacles, and (c) what do you think is preventing more women from taking advantage of employment and training opportunities which you may be offering. The workshop members then questioned the panel members about many issues related to interviewing techniques and job opportunities, particularly nontraditional job opportunities.

In the afternoon of the third day, participants once again responded to the counseling interview videotape, one of the pre- and post-test measures, and completed several self-report measures. These measures included the Attitude Toward Women scale, Counselor Response scale, the Women in Careers scale, and the Nontraditional Job Information scale. They were also issued a certificate for completion of a course in continuing education from Penn State. The last small group, "What Can I Do?" concerned how the counselor could effect change in the worksite. Group facilitators raised questions about the difficulty counselors may have in bringing about desired changes and brainstormed strategies for change. Participants were asked to develop three goals which they would like to reach within their own work settings. Participants were informed that within a month there would be a follow up by project personnel to determine to what extent they had accomplished their goals. The final activity consisted of a global evaluation of the utility and interest of the workshop and an assessment of how the counselors had perceived the interactions of their particular small group.

Results

The following results are presented for both outcome and process variables. In all statistical analyses, significance was determined at the .05 level of probability.

Comparison of characteristics of the treatment and control groups was conducted. No significant differences were found between the treatment and control groups on any of six variables assessed: sex, years of counseling experience, percent of time spent in direct counseling, percentage of female clientele, number of previous workshops attended, and highest educational degree earned.

Pre- and Post-test Measures

Female and Male Participation in the Paid Work Force was a 22-item multiple choice scale developed by the project and designed to measure counselors' knowledge about women's and men's involvement in the work force. Several items had been taken directly from the measure distributed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Other items were developed from fact sheets and graphs distributed by the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor. There was no significant difference between pre- and post-test scores on this measure. The mean score on the pre-test was 10.07, and on the post-test it was 10.78. This was out of a possible score of 21. An analysis of variance demonstrated no difference in pre-test scores among the worksite groups.

There were two parts to the counseling session videotape measure, a measure produced by project personnel. In part A, participants were asked to rate the appropriateness of each of 13 responses made by a counselor. In part B, three open-ended questions were presented

regarding the overall problem with the session, alternatives for the client, and goals for the next counseling session. In part A, each correct response received one point, and in part B, responses to the question were rated on a scale of one to five on the basis of the quality of the analysis of the problem and development of an appropriate and specific intervention strategy. This measure also indicated no significant increase in scores according to a t-test. Out of 13 possible correct answers, the mean number of correct answers on the pre-test was 10.09 and on the post-test it was 11.06. The differences between mean scores on part B (the three open-ended questions) was also non-significant. When the workshop group was categorized by work-site, there were no significant differences on pre-test scores for either section of the counseling videotape among the three groups. On this test, as on the knowledge test discussed earlier, the counselors from private and community agencies had slightly higher scores.

Post-test Only Measures

The Attitude Toward Women scale is a 15 item Likert-type instrument developed by Spence and Helmreich (1978). This was used as a post-test only measure. There was no significant difference between the treatment and control groups. The mean score for the treatment group was 55.82 and for the control group it was 56.33. Since the highest possible score on the scale is 60, it appears that most counselors were reporting fairly extreme attitudes in the direction of liberal rather than traditional attitudes about women. In view of this ceiling effect, a significant difference was unlikely.

Two attitude scales, using a technique called the Method of

Ordered Alternatives (Sherif and Sherif, 1969), were developed by project personnel. This type of instrument is based on a theory of attitudes which stresses that one's position with respect to an issue is important, but so is the extent of one's ego involvement with the issue. Each attitude scale consisted of nine statements about an issue. The two issues selected were Women and Careers and Nontraditional Job Information. On the Women and Careers scale, there was no significant difference in the number of statements rejected. Also, there was no significant difference between the treatment and control groups on the most acceptable position. In both groups everyone chose either position one, two, or three, all of which represented a fairly liberal, nontraditional attitude toward women. On the Nontraditional Job Information scale, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups on either the most acceptable position or the number of statements rejected.

The final post-test only scale was a counselor response scale which was developed by project personnel. This scale consisted of six written case histories of client-counselor interactions in career counseling situations. After each story four possible responses were listed and four phrases which might describe the responses were listed in the second column. One of the four responses was an appropriate response as defined by expert judgments obtained informally from professors of counselor education. The task was to match the responses with the phrases. A person's score was the number of correct matches of descriptive phrases to counselor responses. This scale assesses

the counselor's skill at recognizing which is the best of several responses in a counseling situation and why certain others are inappropriate responses. It is assumed an ability to recognize these characteristics of possible responses is related to the likelihood of using the appropriate kinds of responses in one's own counseling. On this measure the treatment group had a slightly higher mean score than the control group, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Worksite Followup

The final type of evaluation was the worksite follow up. Participants of the workshop were asked to identify three goals for change related to their worksite. Participants retained a copy of these goals as did project personnel. One month following the workshop a questionnaire was sent asking for information about the extent to which participants had met or were working toward each goal, and what contribution the workshop had made toward their progress in reaching each goal. Twenty of the 27 subjects returned the questionnaire for a response rate of 71 percent. Each subject enumerated three goals for a total of 60 goals. In response to question number one, "How close did you come to reaching this goal?" nine people or 45 percent reached some of their goals. Eight people reached one goal; one person reached two goals. Eighty-three percent of those who had not reached their goals indicated that there had not been sufficient time; seven percent said they lacked the knowledge and/or skills required; and nine percent said the goals were no longer important. Ninety-seven percent of the people indicated that they did intend to continue working toward their goals. In answer to a question, "Did any aspect of the

workshop help you in working toward your goals?" 98 percent of those responding answered yes. In answer to the question, "Which of the following was most beneficial concerning this goal?" the panel discussions were most beneficial in working toward 40 percent of the goals, while small group activity was second with 27 percent. Informal conversation, beneficial in 23 percent of the cases, ranked third followed by large group discussion with 20 percent and lectures representing 19 percent. Ten percent of the goals were benefitted by all activities.

The goals which were quickly reached were those within the ability of the individual. That is, it was more likely for a goal to be accomplished that required no cooperation with anyone other than the participant. For example, a goal such as "I will share this information with my colleagues" was more likely to be reached than "I will start a women's center at my campus." Although we were not able to measure behavior change directly, these results indicate that counselors were able to affect some change within their work settings. Nearly all participants attributed their ability to facilitate change to some aspect of the workshop.

The lack of difference in the comparisons of knowledge and skill of participants when they arrived and in comparisons by worksite of their self-reports about the workshop, leads to a conclusion that this workshop would be useful for counselors from a very wide range of work settings and with varied education and counseling experience.

Overall Rating

The overall ratings of the workshop were quite high, 93.1 percent

of the participants giving it the highest rating. Two of the three panel presentations received the highest positive ratings; the next highest overall ratings were given to the sessions using discussion of the videotape job interview. It seemed that the most successful activities were those for which there was adequate time allowed for discussion among the participants and with any guest speakers.

There were some differences among worksites in the analysis of activities. For example, the introductory panel of women with non-traditional careers appeared to be more stimulating to counselors from private and community agencies than for counselors from the other two groups, ABE and vocational education, and college and university counselors. In response to the job search panel, counselors from private and community agencies found the discussion far more helpful than the speakers' presentations. ABE/vocational education counselors and college and university counselors found the presentations and the subsequent discussions equally helpful. When asked to what extent the information provided by the panel of employers changed counselors' attitudes or opinions, counselors from colleges and universities were more likely to express an attitude or opinion change than either ABE/vocational education counselors or private and community agency counselors. In analyzing participants' ratings of activities by work experience and educational background, some differences were found but none of them were statistically significant. For example, counselors with the most counseling experience and education were more likely than any other group to give the highest overall rating to the workshop. When counselors were asked to what extent did the

employer's panel provide you with new information, counselors with more than three years experience were more likely to perceive new information from the employer's panel than those with three or fewer years of experience.

Participant Suggestions

Participants were asked what additional topics should be covered in a workshop such as this one. Everyone indicated the need for training in specific counseling techniques. Other topics recommended included: more job information, how to utilize community resources, assertiveness training, coping with multiple roles, problems with specific clients such as battered women, and handling sexism. ABE counselors indicated an interest in learning about nonsexist materials.

A second question, "For whom would this workshop be appropriate?" provided the response that the workshop was appropriate for all the groups who were presently participating. Many participants highlighted the importance of such a workshop for anyone who counsels women and especially for people associated with a women's center. In addition, many believed the workshop would be appropriate for high school counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and personnel managers in hospitals and industry. Several people mentioned counselors with the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and the Bureau of Employment Security as appropriate participants. Participants indicated that the workshop would be appropriate for most counselors regardless of the extent of their experience. It was suggested, for example, that such a workshop would be beneficial to student interns, beginning, and experienced counselors, and that having many levels of experience

was important to the success of the workshop. Most participants believed the minimum educational level of participants should be college graduate, however, some felt that counseling experience or counseling courses would be adequate preparation while others believed a graduate degree might be helpful.

The third question, "What was the best part of the workshop?" yielded a variety of responses. The best part of the workshop, it would seem, was not one particular activity but rather the opportunity for counselors to interact with one another. This had been mentioned early on in the small group activities when counselors were asked what they hoped to gain by attending this three-day workshop. Some mentioned that the small group activities had been especially beneficial in fostering group interaction. A number of participants thought the panels were particularly good, and several mentioned the introductory panel as the best, although it was generally referred to as the panel on nontraditional careers. When asked what the worst part of the workshop was, participants indicated that they believed there had been too many evaluation forms to complete. Some people would have preferred changing the composition of the small groups (the groups were the same over three days). Others did not enjoy the employer panel claiming the panelists had dodged important issues. Other activities mentioned were the introductory lecture, the lifelines exercise, and the life/career planning lecture. Some participants indicated that they would have preferred a longer workshop.

Participants were asked, "In what way could this workshop be improved?" and several suggestions were offered. Many people believed

there should be more time allowed for discussion, and that this might best be managed by increasing the total time of the workshop. More audio-visual aids would have been helpful. More opportunities to get acquainted with the entire group, rather than just members of one small group, was suggested. Some respondents felt that it would have been beneficial to include the panel members in the small group discussion, and there was a definite need to increase the representation of minorities on the panels. Others believed that small group activities for those sharing similar problems or those in the same type of work setting would have been helpful. Several people indicated that they enjoyed the panel discussions and would have liked more panel discussions. Other people would have liked to have more small group activities, particularly on the first day. There was a general feeling that evaluation forms such as the knowledge test, the counselor response scale, and the counseling videotape scale could have been used as learning tools had they been discussed at some point during the workshop. This had not been done because these were used as pre- and post-test measures, but perhaps it would have been a good idea to review these at the close of the workshop so participants could have had some knowledge of how they had scored.

Recommendations

The formal evaluation of the workshop plus the informal observations of the staff obtained during the presentation of the workshop suggests a number of general recommendations.

Recommendation One: Develop the "support group" concept for counselors.

The counselors in this workshop were all volunteers and highly

motivated to do their best to help their clients. They already held fairly liberal attitudes toward women's life roles. There appeared to be much less need to help them develop sex-fair attitudes toward counseling women and much greater need to provide more specific information and skills needed to carry out successful life/career counseling. Almost all of the counselors felt a great need to talk to other counselors, sharing information and finding out how they coped (or did not cope) with the problems they confronted. Thus, they reported very high ratings of this workshop experience which appeared to serve an important function as a support group for the counselors themselves. The extremely positive response of the counselors was a little surprising since our measures indicated most already possessed many skills. These results provided strong support for the utility of the workshop approach to provide support for practicing counselors in addition to providing specific training. One would speculate that such activities might be useful in preventing professionals from becoming disillusioned with their work and in helping counselors set and achieve specific goals rather than relying on good intentions.

Recommendation Two: Develop regional workshops for counselors.

It would appear that several small workshops around the state would serve the counselors better for two reasons. First, it would provide more meaningful contacts with professionals in the area and this informal network would be useful for effective referrals. Second, most of the specific job information that counselors wanted and needed was fairly area specific. Thus, having panel members from the immediate area would be more appropriate. For example, information about where

to find data about union openings which was presented by panel members at this workshop was primarily useful to those in the Pittsburgh area. There is also a need for even more emphasis on nontraditional jobs, particularly in the skilled crafts, and actual job search strategies for that particular locale (since many female clients are geographically limited in their possibilities). Counselors felt they were unprepared to realistically advise women about the advantages and disadvantages of nontraditional jobs. This supports the need for additional panels of women in various jobs to tell them what it is like to work in various occupations. It also suggests the potential of a panel of women who have been clients and who can highlight for the counselors which procedures/suggestions they found helpful and which were not helpful. Since most programs or agencies do very little systematic evaluation or follow up after termination, counselors rarely get a chance to receive feedback from their own clients which would probably be the most useful way to improve their skills. As a tangent, this suggests the possible utility of training counselors in how to get such feedback and how to make their agencies more responsive to the needs of the client populations they serve.

Recommendation Three: Match counselor needs with workshop content.

It has already been suggested how a workshop might be devised to better serve the needs of the practicing counselors who are highly motivated and would elect to attend such a workshop. The second type of workshop would be useful for new counselors who have relatively little counseling experience. These counselors may well have sex-fair attitudes toward counseling but will lack good counseling skills.

There was evidence in this workshop that the counseling skill components were too low level for most of the participants and for those who did need them, there were not nearly enough to lead to meaningful improvement in their level of skills. A training program or workshop to effectively improve actual counseling skills would need to be longer and more intensive. Clearly additional measures would be needed to appropriately evaluate such a program. A third type of workshop would be needed to reach the types of counselors that were not sampled in this project since only volunteers were included. It appears that a self-selection process was at work which resulted in a sample of counselors that was highly biased in a liberal direction. It is possible that those counselors for whom the project was originally intended, those who might be providing inadequate or sex-biased counseling, were not reached. It would seem necessary to provide such workshops as part of mandatory in-service training if they are to reach the counselors who would benefit most from them. This type of workshop might place more emphasis on exploring the counselor's attitudes and developing sex-fair counseling skills independent of one's personal attitudes. In summary, three different types of workshops seem to be needed to fit the needs of various types of counselors and to be able to improve counseling services, particularly those provided for women clients.

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